

EYEWITNESS

"The Powers Case"

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With Walter Cronkite, CBS News Correspondent, New York;
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CBS News Correspondent, Washington.

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ANNOUNCER: The following program is produced by CBS NEWS.
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SPEAKER: There he is, Francis Powers, obedient tool of
the American military machine.

CRONKITE: That was the way Moscow's official propaganda
described the U-2 pilot at his trial as a spy, nineteen months ago.
This week in Washington, Powers was described in more honorable terms
by members of a United States Senate Committee.

SALTONSTALL: And after hearing McCone and after hearing
Powers, my only reaction is that I commend Powers as being a courageous
young American citizen who was - did his duty under very difficult
circumstances and lived up to his agreements with his employer, the
C.I.A.

CRONKITE: The trials of Francis Gary Powers apparently
are over, but the Powers Case, still full of unanswered questions and
disturbing conflicts, the case itself remains stubbornly open.

It happened this week in Washington. Tonight
you're an eyewitness. Your correspondent, Walter Cronkite.

(Music)

ANNOUNCER: EYEWITNESS, the big news of this week.
Tonight witness "The Powers Case," brought to you by Cyanamid.

CRONKITE: The first trial of Francis Gary Powers was
conducted before the Supreme Court of the Soviet Union in August 1960.
The second trial, this week, was before the court of American public
opinion. Powers stands in the clear, an ordinary man caught up in
extraordinary circumstances and, in a way, magnified by them. He has
the endorsement of his employer, the Central Intelligence Agency, the
praise of a Senate Committee and the American public.

But the books can hardly be closed on the Powers Case because with almost every answer new questions have been raised, if not about Powers' own conduct in the affair, then about the conduct of the C.I.A., and the possible implications are broader than any issues about the pilot or the agency itself.

In this half hour we'll examine some of those new questions in the Powers Case. We'll begin in a moment, after this message.

(ANNOUNCEMENT)

CRONKITE: The U-2, an unarmed airplane that blew up a summit conference, shook our military planning and launched an obscure young man into a violent public controversy. The most dramatic questions revolve around the pilot but some of the most worrisome, from the standpoint of our military security, revolve around the fate of the plane itself.

The U-2 is a difficult target: long, fragile wings, a thin, light-skinned fuselage giving it vast range and a high ceiling. Its only armor, a sheath of special paint developed to baffle radar. It's a plane designed for one specific purpose, reconnaissance, a 20th century form of espionage, photographing the ground from high altitudes, recording other military data on electronic instruments.

For four years the U-2 eluded Soviet defenses, performing its job like an old pro, with superb efficiency and without fanfare, until one day in May 1960.

That day a U-2 was flown by Francis Gary Powers, a former Air Force pilot, now a civilian working for the Central Intelligence Agency. He'd taken off from an Allied base in Pakistan. His mission, to fly from there to another base in Norway,

3,000 miles northwest, photographing Soviet territory en route. His trip ended violently, dramatically, in a field near the Soviet city of Sverdlovsk.

To the Soviet Union this wreckage was a national cause, national outrage over the violation of Soviet boundaries, national pride over the fact that the plane had been brought down.

The evidence of espionage: currency, presumably for the spy to buy his way to freedom, and a spy's last resort, a poison needle, with which he could kill himself instantly if captured and threatened with torture.

Khrushchev made the wreckage a public exhibition but how had this trophy been taken? By engine trouble that forced it down to easy anti-aircraft range or, as Khrushchev insisted, by some new long-range Soviet anti-aircraft rocket, a boast well noted by American military observers. If true, some of them felt, it would cast doubt on the ability of our strategic bombers to get through, the bombers that are still the mainstay of our striking force.

TRANSLATOR: Defendant Powers -

SPEAKER: (In Russian)

TRANSLATOR: Have you understood the indictment?

SPEAKER: (In Russian)

TRANSLATOR: Do you plead guilty to the charges?

POWERS: Yes, I plead guilty.

CRONKITE: U-2 pilot Powers on trial in Moscow.

The indictment itself to which Powers pleaded guilty emphasized that the plane had been brought down with a single rocket. Approved For Release 2000/08/03 : CIA-RDP75-00001R000400080100-5

statement that he had been assured by his C.I.A. superiors that the Russians had no weapon capable of bringing his plane down.

Question: "It was at 68,000 feet that you were struck down by a Soviet rocket?"

Powers: "I was struck down by something. I didn't see it."

That question and that one vague answer hovered over the Senate Committee Hearing Room in Washington this week when Francis Gary Powers made his long-awaited appearance back home, an appearance made melodramatic by the secrecy surrounding his release in return for the Russian spy, Rudolf Abel, the secrecy that swallowed him up again on his return to this country a few weeks ago. The crowd was the largest in this room since the Army-McCarthy hearings.

On the question of how he was brought down Powers offered no further facts but some personal impressions. He explained them afterwards in a brief, noisy encounter with the press, the only time the C.I.A. has permitted Powers to face the many questions that have arisen in the minds of the American public.

POWERS: Well, I don't have much time. All I know is that there seemed to be an explosion. I don't know what caused it but I feel that it was not in the aircraft itself.

REPORTER: Do you therefore believe that it was a rocket?

POWERS: I can't say that. I just know or think that it was external. How it got there I have no idea.

REPORTER: Mr. Powers, you said the Russians told you repeatedly that you were hit by the first shot of the rocket.

POWERS: Not the first, the very first.

REPORTER: By the very first shot of the rocket?

REPORTER: And you said they said it so often that you were inclined to believe that they didn't believe it. Now can you explain that?

POWERS: No, I said that they said it so often that I was inclined not to believe it. If they had used the rocket, it seemed to me that the act would have spoken for itself and they shouldn't have to keep telling me that it was the very first shot or something or other.

REPORTER: Do you feel really it might have been a near miss? Is that your own feeling?

POWERS: Well, I'm sure that there was no direct hit. There was no impact of any kind.

REPORTER: You think it might have been a sidewinder type of air-to-air missile?

POWERS: I really can't say. I don't know.

CRONKITE: Powers was then asked about a parachute he had reported seeing some distance from his own as he came down. Could it have been part of a Soviet rocket being returned to earth?

REPORTER: Any explanation of that second parachute, Mr. Powers? This was quite a revelation.

POWERS: No, I have no idea what it was.

REPORTER: Possibly a booster rocket?

POWERS: Well, that was the first thing that entered my mind because at the time I thought I was shot down and I don't know how they did it, but my thoughts at the time was that it would account for the parachute - recovery of the second stage.

CRONKITE: So the impression left by Powers in Washington remains basically the same as his story in Moscow, a blast, presumably from a Soviet rocket, then a fairly rapid plunge to earth. The only

doubt he raised, whether the Russians really did get him with that first shot. But there's another doubt: First shot or not, was it really at 68,000 feet?

Going back to the day of the flight itself, one of the American bases was in radio contact with Powers right up to that moment over Sverdlovsk. They recorded his report of trouble at 68,000 feet, engine trouble as he described it, and then a gradual descent to 40,000 feet, a descent that took well over an hour. It could have been there at that lower altitude that the Russian rocket caught him.

Why the discrepancy or vagueness? Well, one theory is that it was part of the deal for Powers' release by the Russians, we would say nothing to upset the basic Russian claims. We had embarrassed Khrushchev once by saying we had flown over his territory for four years before Powers. Washington just might reason that there was no use now in opening up those old wounds by discounting the efficiency of his defenses.

Another theory, that we are deliberately letting the Russians think we believe their claims in order to cover up what we really know about their anti-aircraft defense.

In any case, there remains this hole in the story, and not only one, as we'll see in a moment after this message.

(ANNOUNCEMENT)

CRONKITE: Did Francis Gary Powers, captured U-2 pilot, conduct himself honorably as a man in the service of his country?

At his trial in Moscow, with his wife Barbara and his parents in the audience, he testified as a man risking a penalty of death, but his plea to the court was not in the spy tradition, the tradition of resolute silence.

POWERS: I realize that I have committed a grave crime
and I realize that I must be punished for it.

TRANSLATOR: (In Russian)

POWERS: I ask the court to weigh all the evidence -

TRANSLATOR: (In Russian)

POWERS: - and take into consideration not only the
fact that I committed the crime -

TRANSLATOR: (In Russian)

POWERS: - but also the circumstances which led me to
do so.

TRANSLATOR: (In Russian)

POWERS: I realize the Russian people think of me as an
enemy.

TRANSLATOR: (In Russian)

POWERS: I can understand this.

TRANSLATOR: (In Russian)

POWERS: I plead with the court to judge me -

TRANSLATOR: (In Russian)

POWERS: - not as an enemy but as a human being -

TRANSLATOR: (In Russian)

POWERS: - who is not a personal enemy of the Russian
people -

TRANSLATOR: (In Russian)

POWERS: - who has never had any charges brought
against him in any court -

TRANSLATOR: (In Russian)

POWERS: - and who is deeply repentent and profoundly
sorry for what he has done.

CRONKITE: In Washington this week Powers explained that plea as something he did on advice on his Soviet lawyer, as his best hope of escaping the death penalty. His real regret, he said, was that the mission had failed. C.I.A. officials testified that his confession of guilt broke no rules. U-2 pilots, they said, were instructed not to keep silent but to cooperate with their captors.

Afterwards to reporters Powers gave the impression of a man happy to be home but still under wraps.

POWERS: ... very good now.

REPORTER: Are you going to make any public appearances now?

POWERS: No.

REPORTER: What are your plans?

WOMAN REPORTER: What are your future plans, Mr. Powers?

POWERS: Well, I have to get a physical examination pretty soon. I want to find out my physical condition. And I want to take a vacation.

REPORTER: When are you going to go back to work?

POWERS: I'm working now.

REPORTER: Are you going to work -

REPORTER: Mr. Powers, do you intend to remain in the C.I.A.?

POWERS: For a while, yes.

REPORTER: As a pilot, sir?

REPORTER: And after that, sir, what are your future plans?

POWERS: I really haven't decided yet.

REPORTER: ... is this tougher than Moscow?

POWERS: I'm not a captive. No. I was very glad to come here and very reluctant to ...

REPORTER: Where are you going on your vacation?

POWERS: I want to visit some relatives.

REPORTER: Tennessee and Virginia?

POWERS: I have relatives all over.

REPORTER: Mr. Powers, what are you going to do with that money, sir?

POWERS: Spend it.

REPORTER: Slowly or fast?

POWERS: Fairly slowly, I suppose, make it last as long as possible.

REPORTER: Mr. Powers, will you please explain -

REPORTER: Mr. Powers, how many other flights did you make?

POWERS: I think this would be classified and I better not say anything about it.

WOMAN REPORTER: Mr. Powers, do you plan to continue to work with the C.I.A.?

POWERS: For a while, yes.

REPORTER: For a while.

POWERS: Really, I've got to go now.

REPORTER: Mr. Powers, before you go, would you do anything differently at your trial?

POWERS: Well, it's very easy to see things now that could have been done differently.

REPORTER: What would you have done differently?

POWERS: I'd have to think more about this. I don't know. I think that I followed instructions and I would follow instructions again.

CRONKITE: Also satisfied with the results of the hearing were the members of the Senate Armed Services Committee, among them Senator J. Glenn Beall, Republican of Maryland.

BEALL: I thought that - my reaction to Mr. Powers was that he answered the questions forthright, concise. He showed to us - to me that he performed his duty and he violated no laws of our defense or from his employer, the C.I.A.

CRONKITE: In the small Virginia town where Powers grew up in a house that stood where those trucks are parked, Powers also has won a vote of confidence.

Grundy, a coal-mining town, is where Powers went to high school. The principal remembers him as a quiet, honest boy, average in schoolwork, reliable if unspectacular as a football player. His church. Most of his former neighbors talk about him with feelings that are probably shared by most Americans.

STRAWSER: How did you come to know Francis Gary Powers?

MRS. DOYSAYERS: He played football with my son, Bill Doysayers, in high school and came to my Sunday school class at the Grundy Church of Christ.

STRAWSER: What sort of a boy was he?

MRS. DOYSAYERS: He was a boy that I was proud for my son to associate with.

STRAWSER: What do you think of him now?

MRS. DOYSAYERS: I'm still proud of him. I think he did about what most any of the rest of us would have done under the circumstances.

CRONKITE: But in some quarters the testimony in the Powers Case seems no more than a tantalizing glimpse of the facts.

This is Congressman Frank J. Becker, New York Republican, interviewed by Roger Mudd.

MUDD: Congressman Becker, what don't you like about the C.I.A. report on the Francis Gary Powers Case?

BECKER: Well, I just don't like the testimony. I don't like the statements that have been made. I don't like the lack of clarity in informing the American people and the members of Congress just what the contract entailed; and as to the testimony of Gary Powers yesterday there were glaring holes in the statement that when compared with other pilots, combat pilots and others, there leaves a lot to be desired to get facts and true facts.

MUDD: What do you mean "glaring holes," Mr. Becker?

BECKER: Well, for example, whether or not the plane was hit by a bomb or some kind of a missile. Powers testified yesterday he didn't know whether the plane was hit. He testified he saw some kind of an orange glow. Well, if there was a fire in his plane a pilot would know this. Then the question of how he got out of the plane. He didn't press the buttons that he had in order to destroy the plane. The testimony that was given that this bomb that was in there would only render the cameras inoperable - well, this doesn't sound very good. This is why I don't like it. I think there's many things that are left unsaid and frankly I have very much in mind the fact that we traded one of Russia's greatest spies in history, Colonel Abel, and gave him back to Russia after he was convicted in this country of espionage, we let him go back to Russia, to trade him for Gary Powers. Now, I'm just as human as anybody else and I want to see Powers - any one of our prisoners released and brought back but I do think that we ought to get a clear-cut story of just why it was done. It looks to me like it's a whitewash, that we made

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getting information that we should be getting.

CRONKITE: More on the Powers Case in a moment after this word from Miss Bess Myerson.

(ANNOUNCEMENT)

CRONKITE: The code of the spy is a tradition much honored in literature, fact and fiction. One of its leading exponents is Ian Fleming, a former British Intelligence officer, now the author of novels about an agent named James Bond. The stories have a wide following, including John F. Kennedy.

Correspondent Hughes Rudd visited Fleming at his working quarters on the Caribbean island of Jamaica for a specialist's view of the Powers affair.

RUDD: Well, Commander, as a man who's followed things of this nature, what - what do you think of the Powers Case?

FLEMING: Well, I'm interested to be asked that because I think it may turn out to be one of the great espionage fiascoes of all time. Powers was a good pilot and daredevil, earning danger money for the work he was doing but, of course, he wasn't a spy in the true sense. He was operating a spy. He was operating a spy in the sky, this U-2 plane.

RUDD: If James Bond had drawn this job that Powers drew, how do you think he'd had done under the -

FLEMING: I hope he would have taken his pill. I'd like to think he would have. It would put me out of a job because I wouldn't be able to write about him anymore but - Now as to Powers, of course it's true that he was earning danger money and very big danger money in anybody's language, and I daresay it would be right to say that Powers should have taken his death pill if he had a death pill. But I'd say that he probably, and he and his other pals in this business, brought back to America and the Western powers more than

a million ground agents could possibly have brought back even if one could have got them in and out again. So I can only say, really, that as an Englishman I hope that a U-3 is already in operation and that a U-4 is on the drawing board. I don't wish to - I don't wish to feel that Powers is as guilty as some people would say because, as I say, he was an operator of a spy machine and not a spy himself. And they wanted a spy, let's say they wanted a chauffeur, a driver, and not a man like, let's say, Abel.

RUDD: Well, what can we do to avoid this kind of fiasco, as you call it, in the future?

FLEMING: Well, you've got to have better operators at the bottom but, above all, you've got to have better handling of those operators at the top. Now, it seems to me that what went with the Powers Case was that the government, your government, didn't stick to the big lie or didn't, in fact, ever really get it started. If my - the head of where I write these fictional books about a man called James Bond, and his chief is called M, well, substituting M for Mr. Dulles, for instance, I would have wished that M would have simply said to the Russians through our foreign office, if supposing Powers had been our man: "Look here, this is very interesting. You say you've got a fellow called Powers in a U-2 plane and he's got all this equipment, valuable, and a lot of money and gold on him. Well, this is absolutely wonderful because this fellow is an escapee from detention on our base in - NATO base in Turkey and he's a no-good and he's stolen this money, stolen this plane and we understand he's got a girl friend in Paris - he's making for Paris. Now we quite understand that this man has infringed Soviet sovereignty in air space and we quite appreciate that he's got to suffer all the rigors of Soviet law. Please send us back our plane and the remains of our

belongings and so on and so forth. As for this fellow Powers, well, he deserves all he gets."

Now it seems to me that that ought to have been the initial story prepared by C.I.A. and the State Department for just such an eventuality and when that eventuality arose, I think the story ought to have been told and stuck to.

CRONKITE: The handling or mishandling of the original U-2 incident is water over the dam now and the question of whether it was the reason for the breakup of the summit or only an excuse, that argument can never really be settled by anybody but Nikita Khrushchev.

But the current handling of the Powers Case, that is still very much open to question. What is behind the apparent discrepancy between the radio conversation with Powers during his flight and the story he told in Moscow and Washington, the fairly swift catastrophe at 68,000 feet as against the gradual, 80-minute descent from 68,000 to 40,000?

Why, as Congressman Becker asks, if Powers was under instructions to cooperate with his captors, did the C.I.A. wait almost two years to say so?

And why, finally, has the C.I.A. persisted in keeping Powers under wraps, out of range of the understandable public curiosity and indeed public interest?

The C.I.A. to whom we put these questions today has declined any further comment and until these questions are answered the books will remain open on the Powers Case. The big news of this week, and you were an eyewitness.

Your correspondent, Walter Cronkite.

(Music)

ANNOUNCER: EYEWITNESS: "The Powers Case" has been brought to you by Cyanamid.

Next Friday and every Friday at this same time for the drama of big events keep an eye on EYEWITNESS.

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